

Peripheral canal would threaten Delta

THERE they go again. Despite voter rejection in 1982 of a peripheral canal that would divert water from the American River to the main pumps of the California Aqueduct near Byron, agricultural and Southern California water interests have again floated a miniature version of this idea by state and federal officials.

Any idea of diverting water from the Delta — the American River is a tributary — should be sunk immediately. The Delta is too complex an ecological body to tamper with its tributaries.

To divert water from the Delta would affect the salinity of the area and allow more saltwater to intrude into freshwater habitat. Another source of water would be needed to restore the Delta during drought years, and that topic has not yet been broached.

The idea of the canal was hatched during recent negotiations by CALFED, a federal-state partnership agency created to oversee long-term solutions for the Delta. For the past four years, state and federal officials have been trying to find a compromise solution to the Delta's woes, a solution that balances people and fish.

With more than 22 million Californians relying on the Delta for their water — most of them in Southern California — there is constant need to expand water

supplies, a tricky thing to do when considering how the water supplies in the West have been carved up and contracted out.

The canal would benefit Southern California water users and Central Valley agricultural interests. Farmers in the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley would receive 80 percent of their contracted water supply this year, as opposed to the 100 percent delivery for farmers in the central and northern part of the state. The canal would expedite water to the south.

What is really needed in the state's water picture is more water storage capacity.

Already this year, millions upon millions of gallons of water have been lost to consumers, sent to the ocean because of a lack of storage. When this occurs, our water system fails. Increased water storage above or below ground would guarantee that sending water that could someday ease a drought out to the ocean would be a rare sight.

The proposal for a peripheral canal does not serve any positive purpose for Northern California, especially not for the Delta. In fact, it could very well ruin the Delta's delicate balance, just to satisfy the voracious water appetites of Southern Californians and farmers.

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